

Message Text

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ACTION ORM-01

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PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 OMB-01 ABF-01 TRSE-00

AF-06 ARA-06 EUR-12 NEA-10 /108 W

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R 121045Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1221

INFO USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL MEDAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 19287

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, UNHCR

SUBJECT: UNHCR'S COMMENTS ON REFUGEE SITUATION IN THAILAND

1. ON SEPTEMBER 11 SWISS AMBASSADOR, AS DEAN OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, CHAIRED MEETING TO DEBRIEF UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES SADRUDDIN AGA KHAN AND GIVE HIME OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE ADDITIONAL PITCH FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT. ATTENDING WERE AMBASSADORS OF BELGIUM, DENMARK, FRANCE, IRAN, SWEDEN AND CHARGES FROM CANADA AND U.S.

2. HIGH COMMISSIONER STRESSED AT THE OUTSET THAT HE BELIEVED VISIT TO THAILAND HAD BEEN MOST PRODUCTIVE AND THAT HE HAD RECEIVED FULL COOPERATION FROM RTG. OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE, THAI HAD AGREED TO ESTABLISHMENT OF UNHCR SUB-OFFICES IN THE FIELD TO HELP PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT REFUGEE PROGRAMS. HIGH COMMISSIONER ENVISAGES A DUAL APPROACH FOR UNHCR PROGRAM HERE; HEAD OFFICE IN BANGKOK WILL EXERT PRESSURE ON RTG TO MAKE NECESSARY POLICY DECISIONS AND MOVE AID TO THE FIELD, WHILE UNHCR REPRESENTATIVES OUTSIDE BANGKOK WILL MONITOR PROGRAM AND INSURE THAT AID ACTUALLY GETS TO THE
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REFUGEES. IF IT DOES NOT, BANGKOK UNHCR HEADQUARTERS WILL

LEARN OF THIS AND TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION.

3. HIGH COMMISSIONER SAID HE HAD ALSO IMPRESSED ON THAI AUTHORITIES FACT THAT IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR UNHCR TO WORK WITH THE THAI ON A REFUGEE RELIEF PROGRAM IF THERE WERE ANY FORCIBLE REPATRIATIONS. MOVEMENT OF REFUGEES TO THIRD COUNTRIES (HE CITED SIX LAO GENERALS AS AN EXAMPLE) IS ACCEPTABLE BUT THEY MUST NOT BE FORCED TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMELANDS. HIGH COMMISSIONER SAID HE BELIEVED RTG ACCEPTS THIS FACT.

4. SADRUDDIN AGA KHAN ALSO STRESSED FACT THAT UNHCR DID NOT WANT RELIEF EFFORT TO BECOME PERMANENT. AMOUNT OF AID MADE AVAILABLE WOULD DECREASE YEAR BY YEAR WITH OBJECTIVE OF INDUCING RTG AND REFUGEES THEMSELVES TO BECOME SELF-SUPPORTING. CITING EXAMPLE OF PALESTINIAN REFUGEES, HIGH COMMISSIONER SAID IT WOULD BE GRAVE ERROR IF PROGRAM BECAME INSTITUTIONALIZED AND IF UNHCR ACTUALLY UNDERTOOK RESPONSIBILITY FOR ADMINISTERING IT. THIS WOULD CREATE VESTED BUREAUCRATIC INTERESTS AND PROGRAM WOULD CONTINUE FOREVER.

5. ON SPECIFICS, HIGH COMMISSIONER SAID THAI MINISTRY OF INFORMATION BELIEVES THERE ARE 55,500 REFUGEES IN THAILAND. THIS CONSISTS OF 39,000 LAO (INCLUDING MEO), 15,000 CAMBODIANS AND 1,500 VIETNAMESE. HIGH COMMISSIONER NOTED THESE FIGURES VARY SOMEWHAT FROM UNHCR'S OWN ESTIMATES BUT ARE WITHIN THE BALLPARK AND ADEQUATE TO PERMIT REASONABLE PROGRAM PLANNING.

6. HIGH COMMISSIONER VISITED VIETNAMESE REFUGEE CAMP AT SATTAHIP AND FOUND IT EXCELLENT. HE WAS ALSO TAKEN TO KHMER CAMP AT ARANYA PRATHET WHICH WAS UNDER WATER, BUT HIGH COMMISSIONER SAID HE NOTED WHILE FLYING IN THAT ENTIRE AREA OF SOUTHEAST THAILAND IS UNDER WATER AND REFUGEES WERE NO WORSE OFF THAN THAI LIVING IN THE AREA. HE SAID DEPUTY INTERIOR MINISTER PROMISED TO MOVE REFUGEES TO HIGH GROUND SOON. HE SPECULATED THAT SOME OF THE KHMER REFUGEES WILL BE RESETTLED, CITING THE MUSLIM MINORITY AS AN EXAMPLE. HANDLING THE KHMER REFUGEE PROBLEM WILL, HOWEVER, TAKE TIME AND THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

EXPRESSED THE HOPE (HE STRESSED IT WAS ONLY A HOPE) THAT SOME
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OF THEM WOULD EVENTUALLY BE ABLE TO RETURN HOME.

7. SADRUDDIN AGA KHAN SAID THE MAIN PROBLEM WAS THE MEO. BECAUSE OF TIME AND SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS, HE DID NOT VISIT A MEO REFUGEE CAMP BUT FLEW OVER THE NAM-PUA AREA AND TALKED WITH THE DEPUTY GOVERNOR IN NAN AND OTHERS. HE HAD THE IMPRESSION THE MEO ARE "STUNNED." THEIR POSITION IS DESPERATE. THEY NEED FOOD, MEDICINE AND SHELTER. HE DOES NOT BELIEVE

THEY CAN BE RESETTLED OUTSIDE THAILAND AND SAID HE THINKS THE THAI REALIZE THIS. HERE AGAIN, HE WAS HOPEFUL THAT AT SOME POINT IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO RETURN TO LAOS. MEANWHILE EMERGENCY RELIEF IS URGENTLY NEEDED. THE HIGH COMMISSIONER SPECULATED THAT A MEETING MIGHT BE ARRANGED AT SOME POINT WITH THAI AND LAO AUTHORITIES TO DISCUSS REPATRIATION OR THAT A GROUP OF MEO MIGHT VISIT THEIR FORMER HOMELAND AND, ASSUMING THE GOVERNMENT OF LAOS AGREED, REPORT BACK TO THE OTHER MEO THAT IT WAS SAFE TO RETURN. THE HIGH COMMISSIONER SAID HE WOULD HAVE A BETTER FEEL FOR THIS AFTER HIS VISIT TO VIENTIANE.

8. DURING THE DISCUSSION PERIOD, FRENCH AMBASSADOR TOFFIN COMPLAINED STRONGLY THAT ICEM RECENTLY STOPPED FINANCING THE TRAVEL OF LAOTIAN REFUGEES TO FRANCE. HE SAID HIS GOVERNMENT WAS WILLING TO TAKE A NUMBER OF LAO AND HOPED TRANSPORTATION COULD BE ARRANGED. THE HIGH COMMISSIONER NOTED THAT QUESTIONS HAD ARISEN BECAUSE SOME LAO FINANCED BY ICEM COULD HAVE PAID THEIR OWN WAY. ALSO, UNHCR WAS CONCERNED THAT BLANKET AUTHORITY TO FUND THE TRAVEL TO FRANCE FOR ANY LAO REFUGEE WOULD ENCOURAGE MORE TO LEAVE LAOS. HE NOTED THAT THE RTG HAD ALSO RAISED THIS MATTER WITH HIM AND SAID THE HIGH COMMISSION WOULD STUDY IT FURTHER AND REACH A DECISION.

9. COMMENT. WE BELIEVE THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S VISIT HAS BEEN HIGHLY USEFUL. HE HAS OBTAINED THAI APPROVAL TO STATION HIS PEOPLE IN THE FIELD AT THE MAJOR REFUGEE SITES WHERE HELP IS URGENTLY NEEDED AND HE HAS IMPRESSED ON THE THAI UNHCR'S WILLINGNESS TO HELP. HIS VISIT HAS PROBABLY ALSO SERVED TO BRING ABOUT BETTER COORDINATION ON THE THAI SIDE, THOUGH PROBLEMS REMAIN. FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI HAS BEEN FORTHCOMING AND AS A RESULT OF THIS VISIT HAS SAID HE WILL MAKE PERSONAL EFFORTS, BOTH
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BILATERALLY AND THROUGH THE UN, TO HELP RAISE FUNDS FOR UNHCR. RESPONSE TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S APPEAL FOR FUNDS BY THE CHIEFS OF MISSION PRESENT AT THE BRIEFING WAS GOOD, AND WE WOULD IMAGINE THAT MOST OF THEM WOULD URGE THEIR GOVERNMENTS TO SUPPORT THE UNHCR PROGRAM IN THAILAND.
MASTERS

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